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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MUNICH 000388

SENSITIVE
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [GM](#) [INRB](#)
SUBJECT: GERMAN "INDEPENDENTS" CHALLENGE MAINLINE PARTIES IN
BAVARIA AND COULD AIM HIGHER

REFS: A) Munich 358 and previous, B) Frankfurt 3300, C) Berlin
1623

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SUMMARY

11. (SBU) A new sort of German politician, the Freie Waehler (Independent Voters) (FW), has invaded the parliamentary turf of establishment parties at the top of Bavarian politics. Their leadership dreams expansively of its first-ever nationwide campaign for the European Parliament in June 2009, hoping to replace the heretofore dominant Christian Social Union (CSU) and, at the same time, start a revolution in how Germany elects its leaders. The FW, a self-proclaimed "community of interests" rather than a "party," has a recognizable conservative-style approach to governing that emphasizes "freedom from party ideology," although critics lampoon them as "free of concrete ideas." Their leadership in Bavaria believes that grass-roots voter contact with their elected officials is the future of politics in Germany and that this approach gives the FW an advantage over the traditional parties that are committed to a top-down party structure. End Summary.

Emphasizing Individual Competence, Strong Grassroots

12. (SBU) The Consul General and ConGen Munich staff met with the leadership of the Bavarian Freie Waehler (Independents) on December 17. Hubert Aiwanger (chair of the Bavarian FW since 2006) admitted that his 21 FW colleagues who won Landtag seats hardly knew each other before they rendezvoused in November when the Landtag constituted itself. Voters "liked how the FW emphasized candidate individuality over party platforms or discipline," according to Aiwanger's colleagues Tanja Schweiger and Gabriela Pauli -- formerly a CSU district councilor and nemesis of former Minister President

Edmund Stoiber -- who joined Aiwanger at the table. They observed that the FW capitalized on 30 years of strong growth at the municipal and rural level, where the FW holds 40 percent of city council seats, fourteen of 71 district administrators, and every third Bavarian mayor's office. Twenty-nine percent of Bavarian farmers, former guaranteed supporters of the Christian Social Union (CSU), voted FW in 2008. These FW strengths stand in contrast to the few thousand Bavarian Free Democratic Party (FDP) members who enjoy practically no representation in some rural areas in Bavaria. Aiwanger believes that the FDP (rather than the FW) ended up as the CSU coalition partner because of the CSU's national ambitions.

Unfazed by the Lack of a Platform

13. (SBU) While the main German political parties struggle to craft and project a modern image to which voters can relate (reftels), the FW advocates "a more American style of politics and politician," as Aiwanger put it, adding, "We believe the voters want to influence politics directly." When pressed, he could not specify any policy or program that concretized the FW philosophy, and, like the voters, his team seemed unfazed by the FW's lack of a party platform. "The voters know us and trust us to do our best to solve the real problems of real people," Schweiger insisted.

14. (SBU) Without an official platform or substantial party structure, the FW Independents positioned themselves in opposition to the perceived "autocratic style and haughty tone" of the "entrenched CSU" in Bavaria, Aiwanger said. The switch for CSU voters to the FW was made easy since the FW philosophy is basically conservative, Schweiger explained, adding that the FW emphasizes "social" values like "personal freedom and helping those unable to help themselves," which also conforms to a CSU perspective. FW politicians "feel closest to small and medium-sized business, not to big companies," Aiwanger added. They are stronger down at the grass roots and at the lower levels of government, and have not made the leap to the big leagues, Pauli admitted laughing. She observed that her FW colleagues still have no office staff, and that "the papers produced by the Landtag bureaucracy are piling up on our desks."

Dreams of Replacing the CSU in the European Parliament

15. (SBU) Aiwanger said the Independents would caucus in early February 2009, and thought a majority would, like him, push for a decision to run nationwide in the European Parliament elections in June 2009. Currently, other than in Bavaria, the Independents are particularly powerful in the German states of Baden-Wuerttemberg, Hesse, Thuringia and Saxony. Running nationally would especially challenge the CSU, and Aiwanger was delighted at the prospects of stealing so many votes from them in Bavaria that the CSU, confined to campaigning only in Bavaria, would fail to reach the nationwide threshold of five percent to enter the European Parliament. The FW representatives were less sanguine about prospects that the FW would participate in German national elections in September 2009, since it would require a more complex organization and a restructuring that might lead to a split between supporters and opponents of the idea.

16. (SBU) Aiwanger conceded that the FW is challenged to identify candidates and set up an organized campaign in time. He also has to face the fact that a significant number of FW adherents, both in Bavaria and in other States, believe the FW should stick to what it does best and not run for offices above the municipal level, according to media reports and comments from FW adherents in the field.

Comment

17. (SBU) The FW leadership in Bavaria believes the time has come to change the way Germans elect their leaders. They want to replace the slow-moving, entrenched national parties and overbearing ideologies with something that they perceive as "more American," emphasizing individual personalities who cultivate direct voter contacts. With thirty years experience at the municipal level, the challenge will be for the FW to maintain their proud diversity based on local teams while they strive to maintain coherence in the big leagues. Before the September 2008 Landtag elections, with the FW

successfully emphasizing "personality," CSU leaders missed the point when they mocked the FW for its lack of a concrete platform. A successful FW national campaign for the European Parliament in June 2009 that even replaces the CSU there could reduce the CSU to nothing more than a regional player and, at the same time, start an evolutionary change in how Germany elects its leaders. End comment.

18. (U) Consulate General Munich coordinated this report with Consulates General Frankfurt and Leipzig and Embassy Berlin. Track Munich reporting at <http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Portal:Germ> any.

NELSON